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Blog article by Chief Commissioner Dr Michael Wardlow

The race is on

Often I find myself thinking that here in Northern Ireland we have adopted, by default, a reactive approach to dealing with our big issues. In effect, this means that we deal with the urgent stuff only when it becomes urgent, the stage at which it presents itself in those flashing neon lights which scream "Deal with me now or else!".

So it is that once again we find ourselves facing a new round of political talks on the past, parades and flags/emblems in the mouth of this year's 'marching season'.

The reality is that the big business issues which have beset this place for decades will not disappear through the passage of time, denial, avoidance or even well intentioned policy initiatives. They are deep seated fissures which will continue to send out seismic shocks until they are addressed and dealt with rigorously and appropriately. The work of re-construction is not solely the preserve of politicians and to this end, we all have a responsibility to deal with the legacy of our past.

It is my view that prejudice lives in the polite core of society as well as its rough edges where it can be repressed as well as expressed. Whether latent or overt, prejudice can be toxic and rebuilding a society shattered by decades of conflict requires that we acknowledge our own shortcomings, our own prejudices, before we can hope to create a shared space for all.

Thinking about prejudice brings me on to the subject of race. The revised Race Equality Strategy has just gone for consultation. We all know, too well, that race hate incidents are on the rise and as a result, once again Northern Ireland has made the national press for all the wrong reasons. Race hate crime is unacceptable. It is an attack on a person's humanity, their identity as a human being, and so we must challenge hate



crime. It doesn't only affect the victim, it causes fear amongst the community from which they come from and as a result, it diminishes us all. At a wider level, it damages the quality of life here in Northern Ireland, it erodes our international reputation and causes untold damage to our economy. Of course it needs a robust response from the policing and justice system, but it doesn't, and can't stop there. It needs a response from all of society - from all of us. We cannot enjoy the luxury of the bystander. One way to make your voice heard is through the consultation.

This process offers you the opportunity to say what you think are the key issues which a new Race Strategy should address, to identify the key fault-lines which currently exist and to offer an evidenced based response which deals in solutions and not one which raises further problems. The strategy might have been developed by policy makers, but all of us in civil society have the possibility to mould it and shape it to ensure it delivers on the challenge before us - to build a united community. The race is on... don't simply be a spectator.



Read the Chief Commissioner's blog "*Here's the thing...*"

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